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THE

NECESSARY DUTY

OF

FAMILY PRAYER,

AND THE

DEPLORABLE CONDITION

OF

PRAYERLESS FAMILIES

CONSIDERED.

In a Letter from a Miniſter to his Pariſhioners.

With PRAYERS for their Uſe.

THE THIRTEENTH EDITION.

Families are the firſt Seminaries of Religion; and if Care be not there taken to prepare Perſons (eſpecially in their tender Years) for public Teaching and Inſtruction, it is like to have but little Effect.

Archbiſhop TILLOTSON's Sermon on Family Religion.

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THE

NECESSARY DUTY

OF

FAMILY PRAYER, *&c.*

THE Neglect of Daily Prayer is a Default of that high Nature, and diſmal Conſequence, that my Deſire of your Salvation conſtrains me, my dear Brethren, to try ſomething out of the common Way of my Paſtoral Care, in writing this Letter to you, to endeavour to reclaim you from it: For to live without Prayer, is to live as "without God in the "World;" as if we were ſufficient to preſerve and provide for ourſelves in all our Concerns, and deſpiſed Help from Above; and as if we thought ourſelves ſo perfectly void of Sin, that we needed not God's Grace or Mercy: Which is a very high Degree both of Impiety and Inſolence, enough to make any one tremble that conſiders it, except it be the ſenſeleſs Atheiſt, if there be any ſuch Monſter in the World.

I have very often ſhewn you both the Sin and Danger of this inexcuſable Neglect in my Sermons; and now come to leave this ſtanding Teſtimony of my Care for your Souls at your Houſes, that I may ſtand clear of your Blood, if ye periſh in this criminal Omiſſion: And periſh ye will, without all Peradventure, if ye thus keep at a Diſtance from God by a conſtant Neglect of him, and hardening your Hearts againſt him: For the Holy Ghoſt expreſly teſtifies, that "ſuch as are far from "God ſhall periſh," *Pſal.* lxxiii. 27. And thereupon concludes, that "it is good to draw "near unto God," *ver.* 28. And the holy Scriptures throughout; which aſſure us on the one Hand, that "if we ſeek God, he will be found of us;" do as poſitively declare, on the other Hand, that "if we forſake God, he "will caſt us off for ever."

This is moſt unqueſtionably applicable to every prayerleſs Perſon, and will, I hope, awaken every one into whoſe Hands this Admonition ſhall fall, to a conſcientious Obſervance of daily Prayer, through the Grace of Almighty God in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

But my preſent Deſign is, to preſs the daily Exerciſe of Prayer in Families, without which no Family can begin or end any Day as they ought; becauſe they neglect that Morning and Evening Sacrifice, which God requires at their Hands; and ſo they incur his Diſpleaſure, when they might enjoy his Bleſſing.

St.

St. *Paul* delivers our Maſter's Will to us as to this Point, in theſe Words: "Put on the "whole Armour of God,—praying always "with all Prayer and Supplication in the Spi-"rit." *Eph.* vi. 18. which requires our conſtant Performance of all Kinds of Prayer, in their Seaſon, in a ſpiritual Manner. So that if we are wanting in the reaſonable or due Obſervance of ſecret Prayer in our Cloſets, or of publick Prayer in the Congregation, or of private Prayer in our Families, our *Chriſtian Armour* is not complete, and we lie open in that reſpect to the Arrows and Batteries of our ſpiritual Enemies, who ſeek all Advantages againſt us: Yea, and we thereby provoke God to deliver us up into their Hands, foraſmuch as we do not crave his Aid, which is the only ſufficient Protection from them: The Words of the Prophet *Jeremiah* are very dreadful, *Jer.* x. 25. "Pour out thy Fury upon the Heathen "that know thee not, and upon the Families "that call not upon thy Name." This is ſpoken indeed of the idolatrous Heathen; but Chriſtian Families, who have not ſo much Knowledge or Senſe of God's infinite Perfections, as to conſtrain them to call upon his Name by daily Prayer, may read that Text with trembling Hearts, ſince they degenerate into the ſinful Stupidity of the Heathens as to this; and if they contract the woeful Guilt, they will be obnoxious to the dreadful Puniſhment: Yea, ſince Chriſtians ſin againſt clearer Light, ſtricter Vows, and more abundant Mer-

cies than the Heathens, they must expect a greater Condemnation.

And here it is fit to be considered by all Governors of Families, with due Regard and Application; that those Sins which we might have prevented in our Families, by our Religious Government of them, will be most justly imputable to us before the Judgment-Seat of our Lord. For in this we *hide the Talent* of Power and Authority which our Lord gave us, *in a Napkin*, which ought to have been employed in his Service, and for the Good of those he had committed to our Care. And surely, the Cries and Accusations of Persons so near to us as those of our Families, will pierce us with a peculiar Sharpness in the Day in which we must appear together before God, to give Account for all that we have done in the Body.

The Remark of the most Reverend Archbishop *Tillotson* is very apposite to this Case, and very awful and awakening: "It ought, "*says he*, to make us tremble, to think with "what Bitterness and Rage our Children and "Servants will fly in our Faces in the Judg-"ment of the Last Day, for having been the "Cause of their eternal Ruin, for want of "due Care on our Part to prevent it. In that "Day, (*continues he*) next to God and our "Consciences, our most terrible Accusers will "be those of our own House; nay, those that "came out of our own Bowels, and were not "only a Part of our Family, but of ourselves."

Consider

Conſider this effectually, I beſeech you, my Brethren, whilſt it may be prevented; for whoſoever has the Senſe and Bowels of a Man, muſt think ſuch a Caſe intolerable, if he does indeed believe it.

A Chriſtian Family, is a Society of Perſons that own the ſame God and Saviour, are obliged by the ſame Religious Vows and Rules, are agreed in the ſame Worſhip, encompaſſed with the ſame Infirmities, ſenſible of the ſame Wants, and liable to the ſame Dangers; ſo that they are all equally concerned to unite their Hearts and Lips in the ſame Petitions to their heavenly Father, and to ſolicit his Mercy by the combined Strength of their Faith and Prayers; eſpecially conſidering that our bleſſed Saviour has made peculiar Promiſes of his gracious Preſence, "where two or three are met "together in his Name," *Matt.* xviii.

How then can a pious Maſter and Miſtreſs of a Family remain unconcerned in the Loſs of ſuch daily Opportunities of glorifying God, and of receiving Benefits ſuitable to their common Neceſſities? of all which they wilfully deprive themſelves and Families, whilſt they neglect to pray together.

The faithful Servants of God are diſtinguiſhed by their pious Houſhold Government, both in the Old and New Teſtament. *Abraham* and *Joſhua*, *Cornelius* and *Aquila*, ſtand renowned upon Record for the Piety of their Houſholds, and will remain ſo to the End of the World. And ſurely, if the Faith and

Zeal of a good Houſholder be duly vigorous and ſteadfaſt, he cannot but delight to call the little Aſſembly of his Family together to worſhip their infinitely good and gracious God, in whoſe Hands their Breath is, and from whom cometh their Salvation. And ſuch as have experienced the Satisfaction and Benefit of ſo doing, will never omit the Seaſons that are proper for this uſeful and delightful Practice.

It is Piety and Devotion that principally diſtinguiſhes a Family of Chriſtians from a Hut of Heathens. Others eat, and drink, and converſe together; but Chriſtians worſhip, and praiſe, and ſerve God together, thro' the Mediation of his Son Jeſus Chriſt.

And God bleſſes ſuch devout Families with peculiar Bleſſings. Theſe are the proper Means to promote Religion and Virtue in the ſeveral Members of the Family; and thus they will come to make Conſcience of their Relative and Social Duties. The juſt Senſe of Religion will make Children reſpectful and obedient to Parents *for the* LORD's *Sake*; and will conſtrain Servants to be diligent, faithful, and ſubmiſſive to their Maſters on Earth, for the Fear of their *Maſter in Heaven*. And for the ſame Reaſon will the Superiors in ſuch a Family be kind, affable, and gentle towards their Inferiors: And thus will the whole Family become peaceable, loving, and contented; for the *Spirit of Supplication* introduces the Spirit of *Wiſdom*, *Holineſs*, and *Peace*. And withal, they take the true Meaſures to have

their

heir lawful Undertakings and outward Enoyments both bleſſed and ſanctified.

Thus will a religious Family appear honourable to all Men, eſpecially to all virtuous and pious People, who cannot but rejoice to behold their pious Order, and their Chriſtian Fellowſhip and Deportment; and will with Admiration call them Bleſſed, and affirm, that *God is among them of a Truth.*

But, on the contrary, where the Government of a Family is not given to God by Piety and Devotion, it falls of courſe to the Devil, according to the Meaſure of its Impiety; which will be apt to advance apace, from the Want of a ſerious Acknowledgment of God, and devout Application to him: And thus will ſuch a Family be apt to grow diſſolute, and to abound in Vice, Diſcord, and Diſorder, and to be expoſed to many Troubles and Calamities.

But I would not here be underſtood to ſum up the whole Matter of Family Religion in daily Prayer: There ought alſo to be the frequent Reading of God's Holy Word in a ſerious and attentive Manner, with the Uſe of ſome plain approved Expoſition of it, for the Benefit of the more Ignorant, when Time beſt admits of it. There ought likewiſe to be an induſtrious Recollection of Sermons, in the which they may mutually aſſiſt each other: They ought to praiſe God in Pſalms and Hymns together, where they are capable of performing it with Decency and Convenience. The Children and Servants ought to be duly

catechiſed. There ought to be peculiar Regard to the Lord's Day, in which the Maſter of the Family is required, by the expreſs Law of God, to look to *all within his Gates*, whether Domeſticks or Strangers, as in the Fourth Commandment. And there ought to be a juſt Diſcouragement of Vice, and Countenance of Virtue.

Theſe Things are of the greateſt Importance; for hereby many a Perſon may be brought to a ſerious Senſe of Religion, even in the Defect of more public Miniſtrations; and may thus alſo be preſerved from the moſt flagrant Contagion of public Debaucheries, and under the moſt violent Rage of public Perſecution. And hereby may many a good Miniſter be trained up for the Service of the Church of God, as we find in the Caſe of *Timothy*, mentioned by St. *Paul*, 2 *Tim.* i. 5. and iii. 15. where the private Inſtructions of a pious Mother and Grandmother, ſerved to bring up a very good Biſhop for the Church of Chriſt.

Yea, there cannot be a more effectual Means taken to make a Nation virtuous and proſperous, than by introducing Chriſtian Diſcipline and Devotion into Families. Could we bring this to prevail univerſally among us, in a ſerious and becoming Manner, it would happily introduce that bleſſed Change which has been long deſired, and with great Coſt, Pains, and Peril, endeavour by many pious Perſons among us; I mean, a *National Reformation*,

formation, which is the greateſt of earthly Bleſſings: And truly, this muſt be effected ſome Way or other, or we ſhall certainly be ruined by our Iniquity. Now I ſay, the pious Regulation of Families in this Nation would render the whole Nation regular and religious; as the healing of all the Parts of a Leper, makes the whole Body ſound: And therefore every Governor of a Family, is either a public Benefactor, or a public Grievance; according to the good or ill Management of his Family.

Upon the whole Matter then: Whoſoever prudently conſults the Glory of God, the Purity of his Church, the Intereſt of his Religion, the Proſperity of his Country, the temporal and eternal Welfare of his Children, the Diligence and Faithfulneſs of his Servants, the Quietneſs and Comfort of his Family, the Honour of his Name, the Peace of his Conſcience, and the Salvation of his Soul, will find conſtraining Reaſons to engage in conſtant Family Prayer, and Religious Houſhold Government; without which he appears too little concerned for his greateſt public and private Intereſts on Earth, as well as for his immortal Concerns.

And how will ye bear it, my Brethren, when ye come at laſt to ſum up the Mercies ye loſt for want of aſking, and the Sins and Diſorders that multiplied in your Families for want of a due Diſcharge of your Duties as the Governors thereof?

Truly Sirs, my Heart bleeds, and my

Bowels are pained, when I consider the dismal End of this Contempt of God. What can you say by way of Apology for so pernicious a Neglect? What Pain would it have put you to, to have worshipped God in your Family? What could you have lost by such a blessed and becoming Practice? How could you think it a Loss of Time from your other Business, when by it your other Affairs would certainly have prospered better in your Hands? How could you refrain from Prayer, under the many Doubts, and Fears, and Miseries of this uncertain Life? Since you acknowledged an infinitely wise, great, and good God, that governs all Things, how could you slight both his Favour and his Wrath? If you have a Friend on whom you very much depend for your outward Livelihood, you court and crouch to him continually, and gladly lay by all other Business, when you can do any Thing to serve him: And can you neglect your infinite Benefactor from Day to Day? Does he not preserve your Life and Being? Does he not open his Hand, and fill you with all Manner of Plenteousness? Does he not offer you the unsearchable Riches of his Love in his only begotten Son? And must you not perish now and for ever without his Grace and Mercy! Alas! where is your Reason, your Conscience, your common Sense, when you omit any sort of requisite Devotion to our infinitely glorious and bountiful God, whom to serve

ſerve is perfect Freedom, to whom to be related as a regenerate Child, is the greateſt Honour, and whom to enjoy is the greateſt Happineſs?

How will the very Heathens riſe up in the laſt Judgment and condemn you? They had a Notion of ſome Deities which particularly watched over their Domeſtic Affairs, and defended and ſuccoured them in their Houſes: Theſe they called *Lares* and *Penates*, and were punctual in their daily Oblations to them: Theſe, alas! paid a ſuperſtitious Worſhip to imaginary Deities. But we have the Knowledge of the only true God; and the only Mediator; and the ſpiritual and true Worſhip, which alone he will accept: And how inexcuſable ſhall we be, if we put not ourſelves and Families under the *Shadow of his Wings?* eſpecially ſince we know his condeſcending Promiſe, that, "if we love him, and keep his "Commandments, he will love us, and come "unto us, and make his Abode with us."

Let me therefore beſeech you my Brethren, as you would give me hope of doing any conſiderable Good among you, and of our comfortable meeting together in another World, that each of you would piouſly take up *Joſhua*'s Reſolution; "As for me, and my Houſe, we "will ſerve the Lord." Shew yourſelves ſuch ſerious Votaries of our holy Religion, as to call your Families together at leaſt twice every Day; and after the ſerious Reading of ſome Part of God's holy Word, unite in Prayers

to

to your heavenly Father, for his Bleſſings upon you in Soul and Body, in this Life, and that to come; and may it pleaſe Him, "who ſees you "in ſecret, to reward you openly," amply, eternally. So prays,

Your affectionate Paſtor,

J. W.

In the Want of better Help, you may join in ſome ſuch Prayers as theſe that follow.

PRAYERS FOR FAMILIES.

Morning Prayer.

O Moſt holy and bleſſed God! who filleſt all Places with thy Preſence, and art a Searcher of all Hearts; with thee is terrible Majeſty to confound thine Enemies, but infinite Mercy withal to ſuccour the humble and contrite Soul. We pray thee, meet us not at this Time in thy juſt Vengeance as a conſuming Fire, but be pleaſed to accept us graciouſly, through thy Mercy in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is our Hope.

We

We have indeed lived too long without juſt Apprehenſions of thine infinite Perfections, and of our own Corruptions and Infirmities. We have wickedly followed our own vain Deſires and Devices, and have not duly owned thy Sovereignty and Dominion over us. We have broken our Vows, and ſtifled our Conſciences, and have defiled ourſelves and offended Thee, having ſet too lightly by the Promiſes and Threatenings of thy Book. O Lord, we lament our Impenitency and Unbelief; and all the ſinful Fruits of our filthy and ungodly Hearts, Lips, and Lives. And we earneſtly beſeech thee, that thou wouldſt not give us up to our own Filthineſs and Folly, and Hardneſs of Heart: But that thou wouldſt graciouſly reduce us into thy Fold and Favour, by the Power of thine Holy Spirit; and accept and pardon us, through the Merits of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

And, O Lord, vouchſafe to cleanſe and ſanctify us in Soul and Body; and make us to glorify thy Name on Earth, and to do the Work thou haſt given us to do. Be pleaſed to ſubdue our Corruptions, and to mortify every inordi-

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nate Affection and unruly Paſſion; and make us entirely reſigned to thy Will, and ſubſervient to thy Laws now and ever.

Keep us, we beſeech thee, from the Snares of worldly Pleaſures and Enjoyments, and make us to ſet our Hearts on Things above: And bring all the Powers of our Souls and Bodies into a willing Subjection to thy Rule and Government. And ſave us from all carnal Ignorance and Unbelief, and from all Ungodlineſs and ſinful Indulgence of the Fleſh.

Vouchſafe, good God, to pity our Weakneſs and Imperfection; and to ſuccour us in all our Temptations; and to ſupport us in all our Sorrows and Afflictions; And grant us a happy End of all our Sorrows at laſt in thine eternal Kingdom.

Make us ever mindful of the End for which we were made, and the chief Work we have to do, and the Uncertainty of this preſent Life; and affect us duly by the Fore-thought of that unchangeable Eternity to which we are haſtening.

May thy Faith and Fear ever dwell in our Hearts, that it may be our continual Exerciſe to keep our Conſciences void

void of Offence, both towards thee our God, and towards all Men.

Suffer us not to ſpend the Day of our Salvation idly and unprofitably. But make us to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling, through thy Grace and Spirit; that we may ſtand always upon our Watch, prepared for our Maſter's Call: That ſo whenſoever thou ſhalt put an End to this mortal Life, it may be the Beginning of a bleſſed Immortality.

Vouchſafe, O Lord, to bleſs all our Governors in Church and State, and grant that they may be thy Miniſters to us for Good, and that we may never be guilty of any ſinful Diſobedience towards them. And give to all the People of this Nation thy Grace, to live in Unity and godly Love, and to further each other's preſent and eternal Welfare.

Be pleaſed to bleſs all our Relations and Friends, and multiply thy Mercies upon them, in Bleſſings of this and of the other World: And vouchſafe to ſuccour all that lie under any Sorrow or Affliction, and be near unto them in all they call upon thee for.

Manifeſt

Manifeſt thine eſpecial Love and Favour, we pray thee, to this Family: Vouchſafe to provide for us, and defend us by thy good Providence. Preſerve us from all Evil throughout this Day; proſper us in all our lawful Affairs; let no Vice nor Variance prevail amongſt us, but keep us in Chriſtian Purity and Peace to our Lives End.

Finally, We praiſe thy great and glorious Name for all thy Mercies towards us: For the Reſt and Safety of the laſt Night, for the renewed Comforts of this preſent Day, and all the good Providences of our paſt Life.

More eſpecially for the Means of Grace, the Motions of thy Spirit, and for thy great Patience and Long-ſuffering towards us; but above all, for the Merits and Mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who ever liveth to make Interceſſion for us; for whoſe Sake we beſeech thee to hear us, accept us, and pardon us, together with theſe our unworthy Prayers: In whoſe moſt holy Name and Words we further pray:

Our Father, &c.

EVENING PRAYER *for a* FAMILY.

O Eternal God! infinite in all Perfections, and worthy of all Praiſe, who wilt be glorified in or upon every Creature which thou haſt made: It is meet that with Fear and Trembling we conſider thy holy and righteous Attributes, and our own polluted Natures, and ſinful Lives. O Lord, we have too much forgotten thee our Creator in the Days of our Youth, and have miſpent too great a Part of our precious Time in Sin and Folly. Alas! with what Diligence have we ſerved the Fleſh and the Devil, and this preſent World! and how little have we minded the Concerns of our Salvation, and eternal Life! We have not duly glorified thee, the God that made us, and in whoſe Hands our Breath is; but have acted in too many Inſtances as if we had been made only for this World, and to pleaſe ourſelves.

O how juſtly mayſt thou ſnatch away our Breath from us, ſince we have ſo much abuſed it in idle and ungodly Speeches; and call us ſpeedily into another

ther World, ſince we have ſo preſumptuouſly built our Hopes of Happineſs in this! And ſhould this be thy Pleaſure, and our Portion, O Lord, how could we appear before thee in the Guilt of Thouſands of unpardoned Sins! or how could we endure to "dwell with ever-"laſting Burnings!"

But with thee, O bleſſed God, there is infinite Mercy and plenteous Redemption. Thou ſo lovedſt the World, as to give thine only begotten Son, that "whoſoever believeth on him ſhould not "periſh, but have everlaſting Life." Lord, we deſire to believe on him, help us, we pray thee, againſt our Unbelief. Enable us to ſubmit all the Powers of our Souls to him in his ſaving Offices; and grant that we may ſo believe on him, that we may obtain Eternal Life through his Name.

Be pleaſed to take away all Impurity and Hypocriſy, all Inſenſibleneſs and Perverſeneſs from us, and make us thy willing and obedient Servants for ever. We know, that without Holineſs none can enter into thy Kingdom: O Lord, make us holy through the effectual Regeneration and Sanctification of thy Ho-

ly

ly Spirit, that we may love thee with all our Heart and Soul, and ſerve thee with our Might and Strength, and may delight to do thy Will, and to deny ourſelves for thy Sake.

And ſince we have too long neglected that great Salvation that was purchaſed for us by the Blood of thy Son; awaken us we pray thee, to improve the remaining Space of our Days with all poſſible Care, giving all Diligence to make our Calling and Election ſure.

Enable us to break looſe from the Snares of this preſent World, and from all the ſinful Entanglements of the Fleſh, and from the Seducements of wicked and diſſolute Men, that we may run with Speed the Race which thou haſt ſet before us, and may perſevere in it to the Death, that we may in the End attain everlaſting Life.

To this End make us habitually mindful of the Shortneſs and Uncertainty of this mortal Life, and the Unprofitableneſs of all earthly Things in the Hour of Death, and in the other World. And make us now to chooſe thy Favour as our chiefeſt Good, thy Son as our Prince and Saviour, and thy Kingdom as our Portion.

And

And when our Souls ſhall be ſummoned to leave this earthly Tabernacle, vouchſafe, good God, to receive us into thoſe everlaſting Manſions, which our bleſſed Saviour has prepared for thoſe that love him.

For whoſe Sake we pray thee, bleſs theſe Nations with Plenty, Peace, and Safety, and with the Increaſe of all that is good; and ſend Peace and Truth amongſt all Nations.

Be pleaſed to bleſs and direct all that are ſet in Authority over us, and grant that they may govern us, and we obey them, in the Fear of thee our God. Vouchſafe to ſuccour all that are Objects of Miſery, whether they labour under ſpiritual or temporal Afflictions; and be pleaſed to adminiſter to them as their Neceſſities of Soul or Body require.

Be gracious to all our Relations and Friends, preſerve them from all Evil, and "bind up their Souls in the Bundle "of Life."

Be more particularly gracious, we pray thee, to this Family, and to every particular Perſon in it. Be pleaſed to dwell with us, and rule over us: Preſerve us in Peace and Safety, and let thy Spirit

rule in our Hearts, that we may faithfully discharge our respective Duties one to another, and may live in Christian Union, Purity, and Peace. Vouchsafe O thou that neither slumberest nor sleepest, to grant us thy Protection this Night; give thy holy Angels charge concerning us; preserve us from Danger by Fire and Tempest, and from the Violence of unreasonable Men: And suffer no Evil to befal any of us, nor any Plague to come nigh our Dwellings.

And forasmuch as we know not whether we shall see the Light of another Day, be pleased, good God, now to seal to every Soul of us the Pardon of all our Sins, through the Blood of the New Testament; that when we come to lie down upon our Death-Beds, we may rest in Hope of a blessed Resurrection.

Finally, we laud and magnify thine holy Name, O Lord, for thy Goodness in our Creation and daily Preservation; for our Health, Ease, Peace, Friends, Food, Raiment, Deliverance, and all the Comforts of this present Life, and for all the Means of attaining everlasting Happiness; for the Price which our Lord Jesus Christ has paid for our Redemption;

demption; for thy bleſſed Goſpel, thine holy Ordinances, and all the Motions of thy good Spirit; humbly imploring thy Grace, that we may ſo live to thy Praiſe here on Earth, that we may at laſt be joined with glorified Saints, and holy Angels, to praiſe thy Name for ever. All which we humbly beg for Jeſus Chriſt's Sake; in whoſe prevailing Name, and comprehenſive Words, we conclude our unworthy Prayers; ſaying,

Our Father, &c.

FINIS.